Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of providing a service to a client from one of a plurality of servers in a server farm, each of the servers arranged to provide the service to the client, each of the servers being associated with a service address common to all of the servers, and the servers communicating with one another so as to update identity and status information stored at each of the servers relating to each of the servers in the server farm, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a DNS system, a request for the service from the client, the request specifying the common service address;

in response to the request, applying a load balancing method to select a first one of the plurality of servers in the server farm and connecting the client to the selected first one of the plurality of servers in the server farm;

receiving, at the client, the identity and status information relating to each of the plurality of servers in the server farm, from the selected first one of the plurality of servers in the server farm to which the client is connected; and

selecting, at the client, a second one of the plurality of servers in the server farm as the server to be used to provide the service to the client, based on the received information.

2. (Original) A method according to claim 1, including the step of providing the client with information relating to the status of each of the plurality of servers.

3. (Original) A method according to claim 1, including the step of providing the client with information relating to the number of users being served by each of the plurality of servers.

4. (Original) A method according to claim 3, wherein the step of selecting the second server includes selecting the server in dependence on the number of users being served by each of the plurality of servers.

5. (Original) A method according to claim 1, including the step of providing the client with information relating to a grouping to which each of the plurality of servers belong.

6. (Original) A method according to claim 5, including selecting the server in dependence on the grouping.

7. (Original) A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the step of selecting a server comprises randomly selecting a server.

8. (Original) A method according to claim 1, including routing the client request to one of the plurality of servers using a DNS round-robin algorithm.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, including the step of communicating said identity and status information between the servers in real-time.

11. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 10, wherein the information ~~information~~ defining the number of users connected to each of the servers and grouping information for each of the servers.

12. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, further comprising requesting a connection to the selected second server.

13. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 12, including, in the event that the connection to the selected second server fails, attempting to reconnect to the selected second server.

14. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 13, further comprising, in the event that the reconnection attempt fails, re-requesting the service to obtain the identity and status information for the servers in the server farm configured to provide the service.

15. (Currently Amended) A client for use in a client-server system, the client being arranged to:

request a service, the request specifying a service address common to all of a plurality of servers in a server farm, each of the plurality of servers arranged to provide the service to the client and the servers communicating with one another so as to update identity and status information stored at each of the servers relating to each of the servers in the server farm;

connect to a first one of the plurality of servers in the server farm selected according to a load balancing method;

receive the identity and status information relating to each of the servers in the server farm, from the selected first server in the server farm to which the client is connected, said information identifying each of the plurality of servers; and

select a second one of the plurality of servers in the server farm as the server to be used to provide the service to the client, based on the received information.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Original) A client according to claim 15, wherein the information identifying each of the plurality of servers further includes information relating to the number of users being serviced by each of the plurality of servers.

18. (Original) A client according to claim 15, wherein the information identifying each of the plurality of servers further includes information relating to a grouping to which each of the plurality of servers belongs.

19. (Previously Presented) A client according to claim 15, wherein selecting the second one of the plurality of servers comprises randomly select the second one of the plurality of servers from the server in the server farm.

20. (Previously Presented) A client according to claim 15, wherein selecting one of the plurality of servers comprises selecting one of the plurality of servers in dependence on one or more of the number of users being serviced by each of the plurality of servers, the status of each of the servers and the grouping to which each of the servers belongs.

21. (Currently Amended) A server for use in a client-server system having a plurality of servers in a server farm, each of the servers in the server farm being arranged to provide a service to the client, each of the servers being associated with a service address common to all of the servers, and the servers communicating with one another so as to update identity and status information stored at each of the servers relating to each of the servers in the server farm, the server being arranged to:

connect to the client in response to a request from the client for the service routed to ~~the~~ a first one of the plurality of servers based on a load balancing method, the request specifying the common service address;

send the identity and status information stored at the connected first one of the plurality of servers to the client; and

connect to the client in response to a selection, at the client, to a second ~~of~~ one of the plurality of servers as the server to be used to provide the service to the client.

22. (Original) A server according to claim 21, comprising a Real-Time Text Protocol server.

23. (Currently Amended) A client-server system having a plurality of servers in a server farm, each of the servers being arranged to provide a service to the client and each of the servers being associated with a service address common to all of the servers, the system being arranged to:

communicate information between the servers so that each of the plurality of servers maintains identity and status information relating to all of the servers;

receive, at a DNS system, a request for the service from the client, the request specifying the common service address;

apply a load balancing method to select a first one of the plurality of servers in the server farm and to connect the client to ~~the~~ a selected first one of the plurality of servers in response to the request;

send server information to the client from the selected first one of the plurality of servers to which the client is connected, said server information identifying each of the plurality of servers and indicating the status of each of the plurality of servers to the client; and

select, at the client, a second one of the plurality of servers as the server to be used to provide the service to the client, based on the server information.

24. (Canceled)

25. (Original) A system according to claim 23, wherein the server information further includes information relating to the number of users connected to each of the plurality of servers.

26. (Original) A system according to claim 23, wherein the servers comprise RTTP servers.

27. (Original) A system according to claim 23, wherein the servers are operable to communicate in real-time.